



Will Barnet

My Father's House

Montserrat College of Art

Will Barnet

My Father's House

Foreword by John Updike

Catalog and Essay by Katherine French

Montserrat College of Art Gallery

Beverly, Massachusetts

October 1 through November 23, 2004

Montserrat College of Art

Stan Trecker, President

Will Wootton, V.P. for Institutional Advancement

Kate Bodin, Dean of Faculty

Katherine French, Gallery Director

Leonie Bradbury, Assistant Gallery Director

TRUSTEES

H. Randolph Lewis, Chair

Steven C. Archer

Louisa D. Attenborough

Beatrice Britton '98

Blair Brown

Bryan Carlson

Janice Colby '94

John P. Drislane

R. Hilliard Ebling

Colleene Fesko

Dr. Ephraim Friedman

Ann F. Guyer

John P. Margolis

Ann-Marie E. Nehme

Sigrid A. Olsen '74

Robert P. Powers

Joan Shafran

Trina H. Smith

William S. Wasserman

Montserrat College of Art

23 Essex Street

Beverly Massachusetts 01915

© 2004 Montserrat College of Art

All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Control Number 2004113211

ISBN: 0-9760851-0-0

Printed in the United States of America

front cover: *The Mantle*, detail, 1992,

oil on canvas, 40 x 42¾ inches

Contents

5	Foreword by John Updike
8	<i>An Act of Memory</i> , by Katherine French
24	Artist Biography
25	Exhibition Checklist
27	Acknowledgments





Italian Section-Beverly, Mass.,
1937, etching, aquatint on paper,
11¼ x 15¼ inches

Foreword

by John Updike

Among the larger cities on the North Shore, Beverly lacks Salem's rich history and stately Federalist architecture, and Gloucester's raffish, picturesque glamour. Instead, it has a pretty coastline and did have the United Shoe factory, an immense conglomeration – not shoes but machinery for making shoes was the product – now refurbished as the Cummings Center. Will Barnet's father worked at the United Shoe as a machinist, and Will, his youngest child and younger son, grew up amid the trappings of what he remembered as "a model of a New England town," with its sparkling sea, its elm-shaded streets, its aura, now faint and now strong, of the Puritan past. On a street not far from the tilting slate headstones of Beverly's old cemetery, Will helped his father and a few workmen build a spacious house in which the family's two sisters lived to the ends of their lives, and to which Will, after moving to New York in the early 1930s, often returned, a loyal son of the household and of the region.

The region's cultural resources permitted this son of an immigrant mill worker to conceive and nurture the desire to become a creative artist – in his words, "to liberate oneself by enveloping one's feelings into some kind of creative form." The boy's own father told him that factory work "destroyed a man's soul;" his introspective mother, Sarahdina, and her Boston-based brother, Harry, encouraged Will to pursue his dreams. The nearby public library – to which Barnet as an adult has been a generous patron – fuelled that pursuit. From the age of six or seven he read adventure tales, some of them illustrated by Howard Pyle and N. C. Wyeth; the public schools of the time offered

an education stronger on history and art than is customary now. In the upstairs Art Room of the Beverly Library, with the indulgence of the head librarian, Will discovered and explored the Old Masters of Europe; as he aged, the fledgling artist gained access to the collections of museums in Salem and Boston, and by 1928 had enrolled at the Boston Museum School. Three years later, in 1931, he had progressed to the Art Students League of New York, and by 1935 he had become the League's professional printer, received his first one-man exhibition, and married his first wife.

Summed up so briefly, Barnett's is a classic and common story of a determined talent's emergence from a far from entirely barren and unsympathetic provincial environment. Unique to Barnett, of course,



Study for The Sisters,
c. 1960-62, pen & ink on
paper, 10 x 8 inches



Study for The Sisters,
c. 1960-62, graphite pen & ink
on paper, 10 x 7½ inches

and unfathomably personal, are the predilections that shaped his individual style. The formal balance and simplifying tendency so striking in his mature work were presaged, we can speculate, by a Japanese play for which he designed the sets in Beverly Middle School, by his boyhood absorption in the classical art of Greece, by the wealth of carved figureheads and highly stylized objects from Asia and Polynesia that he saw in Salem's Peabody Museum. Even as he became increasingly knowledgeable about European masters,

and was selecting his own favorites (Rembrandt, Daumier, Vermeer, Modigliani), he maintained his youthful interest in Native American art with its earthen colors and bold abstraction. And yet, are we wrong to sense in his work a specifically New England quality, derived from the chaste and elegant severity of its tombstones, its saltbox houses, its plain wooden furniture, its clean cold light? While his direct heritage did not include Puritanism, the hymnlike metrics and slant metaphysics of Emily Dickinson's poetry have repeatedly served him as an overt inspiration. His style, like hers, seeks the bone of things.

The works assembled here as *My Father's House* come from the full extent of his artistic life, beginning when his mother and father were available to the teen-age artist as models. Visits home by the successful, cosmopolitan artist yielded in the early sixties a number of graphite studies of his two sisters, and thirty years later he returned to them as they dwelt in the solitude of their father's house at 11 Pierce Street. One plump, one lean, they not so much inhabit as haunt the geometries of the oversize windows and stark furnishings. This is the spacious house that the boy had had a hand in building. Here, in the basement, he had set up his first studio at the age of twelve, and here he had observed the activity of five other human beings and a pet parrot. Here he had often returned, as a relief and refreshment amid the distractions of a metropolitan career. Now time has nearly emptied it, reducing its reality to the sparseness of his own art. The four large paintings, all from 1992, at the heart of this exhibition, their color subdued and their contents minimal, reveal, in Blake's phrase, a "fearful symmetry." Barnett's elegant directness had always something about it of a child's vision, of enumerated wonders. Home, where we first see, is not just where we come to birth, but where we reckon with death.

Mother, c. 1930, pen & ink,
ink wash, gouache on paper,
11 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches



An Act of Memory

by Katherine French

Will Barnet's father built four houses in Beverly, but it is the one on Pierce Street which the artist considered home. Gone is the landscaped garden with a fish pond, as well as the family's entourage of pets; but, otherwise, time has done little to change the outward appearance of this three-storied building. Painted green with gold trim, the structure is large and imposing, its porch a reminder of New England summers before the advent of air conditioning. Here Barnet created a studio for himself, using his art to record the experience of an ideal boyhood. From a nearby beach he was able to ride a bike up the coastal road to Gloucester, as well as row out onto Beverly harbor to view the last of the great clipper ships. Having drawn from the age of six, an adolescent Barnet enriched his early efforts by viewing lithographic reproductions in the Beverly Public Library. As he grew older, he ventured into Salem to visit what is now the Peabody Essex Museum, attracted not only to the stern eighteenth-century portraits, but also their collection of Native American artifacts. By the time he left to study at the Museum School in Boston, Barnet had amassed a wealth of visual imagery which he renewed upon each visit home. Even as he worked through a period of symbolic abstraction in the 1940s and 1950s, the Beverly house and its inhabitants continued to be an inspiration for Barnet's art.

Experts in cognitive development have argued that our first memories determine how we view the world and how we are able to express that vision. Writers examine the same stories through continual retelling. Artists find satisfaction in a rediscovered color or shape.

My Father, etching, aquatint
on paper, 16 x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches





Barnet's figurative work may contain the formal elements found in early American portraiture, but one senses that their stark and lonely feeling comes not only from his understanding of colonial painting, but also from his own experience growing up. By the time Barnet was in elementary school, his brother had left home and his sisters were making hats in a millinery shop. Barnet's father was frequently absent, working at United Shoe or completing construction on the house. Barnet often found himself alone with a mother who he found to be withdrawn and melancholy, an observation confirmed by his drawings. Sitting perched on the edge of her bed or a chair, she is tense and waiting. There is anxiety expressed in her hunched shoulders and hand lifted to cup her chin. She exhibits the same sense of isolation and solitude which Barnet found in his extensive reading of transcendentalist literature. While one can detect a more lively spirit in the image of Barnet's father taking delight when threatened by the upraised claw or sharp beak of his pet parrot, most images show the old man at rest, exhausted by his long day. Whether seated at the kitchen table or falling asleep with a cap still on his head, portraits of Barnet's father present him as diligent and hard working, characteristics which have long defined New England.

Will Barnet embraced these ideals, seeking the lessons of history just at a time when the region north of Boston was beginning to envision its past. When Barnet's family came to Beverly, many cities and towns along the eastern seaboard were experiencing a time of profound change. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, New England was rapidly industrialized, attracting waves of new immigrants. Communities were transformed by this infusion of diversity; their culture became more varied and complex. Yet these changes also prompted the need to secure and preserve the past, as well as embrace the concept of a Yankee tradition which emphasized self-reliance and hard work.¹ This idealized heritage not only served to reassure those threatened by change, but also provided new immigrants with the tools they needed to adapt.

For Barnet's father, this meant a life of hard work; yet his youngest son was no stranger to industry. The young artist helped lay the foundation for their house and went on to apply the same determined effort toward developing his intellect. He read voraciously, naming Hawthorne and Melville as early favorites. Barnet found visual confirmation of the region's history on the colonial grave markers in the Beverly cemetery or walking by the well-appointed Federalist mansions. He visited museums to view the portraits of wealthy merchants. Yet he was also aware of the social disparity between the descendants of these prosperous colonials and his own working-class family. Encouraged by his Uncle Harry, a liberal socialist who worked in Boston, Barnet expanded his readings to include such humanist philosophers as Spinoza. He was sustained by the work of Daumier and Rembrandt, as well as bookstore reproductions of works by Cézanne. By the time Barnet left Boston for New York in 1931, he was well prepared for the challenge of contemporary art.

During his first six years in the city, Barnet drew from models he found on the street, conscious of Daumier and his own socially aware contemporaries. This intellectual young man was also receptive to ideas presented in exhibitions of work by the avant-garde. He studied with Stuart Davis at the Art Students League before beginning his career as a teacher in the school. As technical printer for the League, Barnet completed editions for Louise Bourgeois, William Gropper, Jose Clemente Orozco, and many others. He served as technical advisor to the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration and was involved with the New School for Social Research.² Quite simply, Barnet was well placed at the center of an art world intent upon developing a modern vocabulary. From Cubism to Surrealism, he was attuned to the various movements. There were few New York artists with whom Barnet was not acquainted.

For many, the decades of the 1930s and 1940s were a time to establish new careers. Hundreds of artists converged on New York, coming

My Mother, c.1930,
pen & ink, ink wash, gouache,
charcoal, graphite on paper,
15 x 11½ inches



from all parts of the United States and Europe to explore new visual concepts and their own capacity for self-invention. When describing Arshile Gorky's desire to escape the past in order to create art, Barnett might have been speaking for himself.³ But, unlike Gorky, Barnett maintained close ties with his family. And, although he became more and more intrigued by symbolic abstraction, he found ways to incorporate this new interest with his long time fascination in Native American Art.

Even as a teenager, Barnett had examined artifacts at the Essex Institute, spurred on by literature which idealized the New England landscape and indigenous people. As a mature artist, he found this interest reinforced by Picasso, who not only collected tribal art, but also made it the subject of painting. Barnett organized trips for students to view the Native American collection at the Museum of Natural History and formed a group called the Indian Space Artists. Attracted to geometric design, these painters sought to go beyond Cubism in order to create a particularly American and intentionally spiritual art form, based upon the balance of negative and positive space.⁴

Most of Barnett's work from this time is purely abstract, yet portraits of family exist. Drawings of his father and parrot demonstrate the spatial interaction which engaged the Indian Space Artists. By using a bird as subject matter, Barnett was able to reference an iconography found in tribal culture. The bars of the animal's cage force the composition to work on a flat plane, but still retain its structure and weight. This interpretation of Modernism presaged a turning point in Barnett's career. As the art historian Twig Johnson observed, "By assimilating native art ideas into his own work, Barnett was able to explore everyday life and relationships in a new positive manner."⁵

Family provided a ready model for this exploration. In addition to his wife and children, the artist made lively studies of his two sisters. We can see that Jeanette was more outgoing, completely relaxed when

surrounded by cats, or bending over to let a bird hop onto her back. Eva, however, inherited a nervous personality from their mother. She allows their pet parrot to perch on her hand; holding her body rigid, anxiously covering her mouth. Gradually, as the drawings become more refined we see that their real subject is about decision making. Space is broken into rectangles as Barnett moves away from direct observation toward a conscious arrangement of refined yet powerful shapes. Drawings and paintings from this time are only a small part of a prodigious output which contains some of the artist's best-known work, yet they call attention to all aspects of Barnett's career. Within the same pictorial surface, we are able to discern his love of American portrait painting, an interest in aboriginal design, and a clear understanding of Modernism.

Jeanette and Eva never married, but maintained the family home, enabling Barnett to find occasional respite from the demands of his career in New York. Here, the artist was able to sit in familiar rooms, contemplating the austere geometry of New England. He took his own children, as well as nieces and nephews, to the beach where he had played. He reestablished a relationship with the Beverly library where he'd first been encouraged to enjoy art. Even while developing an international reputation, Barnett was able to revisit the past.

When Jeanette died, Barnett's visits to Beverly became necessarily more frequent. Jeanette had been the more social of his two sisters, going into Boston and even attending a reception when Barnett exhibited work. Eva, however, refused to leave the house after she stopped work. "The house was her refuge," Barnett remarks. "The only contact she had with the world was looking out through the windows, or through the screened door."⁶ Rereading the works of Emily Dickinson, the artist was struck by the similarity between his remaining sister and one of New England's best-known poets. "Eva might have *been* Emily Dickinson," remarks Barnett. "She was an intelligent woman, a very intelligent woman. But afraid of life."⁷



Study for The Sisters,
c. 1960-62, graphite on paper,
12 x 9 inches



Study for The Sisters,
c. 1960-62, graphite on paper,
12 x 9 inches



Study for The Sisters,
c. 1960-62, graphite on paper,
12 x 9 inches



Study for The Sisters,
c. 1960-62, graphite on paper,
12 x 9 inches

His drawings now show Eva contained by isolation, fearful of advancing age. *The World in a Frame*, Barnet's title for his illustrated edition of Dickinson's poems, might also describe Eva's world. Once again, Barnet's conception of New England was supported by experience. For him, the myth of Yankee solitude was real.

Eva felt the presence of her family. While Barnet insists that his sister did not hear voices, he allows that she had "visions,"⁸ gradually populating the rooms in her old house through the sheer force of imagination. In *The Family*, Eva contemplates her deceased family gathering around the kitchen table. Her father sits with a parrot on his shoulder as her mother and sister turn to face him. In *The Three Windows*, Eva stands alone, one hand on the bed she had shared with Jeanette, an empty reminder that she was "missing half of herself."⁹ To her left, the ghostly pentimento of Jeanette emerges to remind the viewer that the past is always present.

Barnet's technique changed with the series of works describing the Beverly house. The paintings retain the same geometric tension

found in both abstract and figurative work, as well as a strict sense of composition; but the artist begins to play with light and dark, introducing shadows to create a somber mood. In *The Kitchen*, Eva is framed by a door; she faces the light, while her family is caught within a gloomy interior. In *The Mantle*, a thin strip of window is framed by a door, illuminating the place where Eva stands. A clock placed on either side of the composition marks the passage of time. In *The Three Windows*, Eva cannot look out onto the world. Instead, the glass before her is dark and foreboding. She turns from the windows toward a faint, but promising, light.

Barnet found no promise in traditional religion. As a young boy, he was surrounded by "friends who all believed in heaven and hell. I didn't believe in any of that."¹⁰ Shocked to hear of the death of a friend's mother in the influenza epidemic, he had been struck by the fragility of life. As he walked through the cemetery on his way to the beach, he began reading tombstones "in order to get to know who lay beneath the ground."¹¹ The history of colonial Beverly was illustrated by the stone carvings of skeletal heads and Barnet was



Study for The Father,
c. 1990-92, charcoal on vellum,
9½ x 7⅞ inches

moved by his first encounter with art. “These were mementos of what had taken place,” he remarks. “At the age of ten or twelve, I discovered that being an artist would give me an ability to create something which would live on after death.”¹²

This ability sustained a mature Barnet. Conscious of both his family and artistic heritage, he began to place himself in the work. Several drawings show Barnet as a young artist, looking down at his father asleep. We gradually become aware that these complex images are more symbolic than observational. For Barnet, the Beverly paintings are “an old man’s pictures.”¹³ He sees them as “unusual from an historical, artistic point of view. Very few artists have gone through such a depth of feeling about a family, the history of a family, what happened to them and so forth.”¹⁴ Barnet painted his family in order to grieve their passing. These late pictures are a kind of thanatopsis, done in order “to extend the memory of my family as a work of art.”¹⁵ In *My Father’s House*, his sister stands behind the screened door, terrified to step out beyond her nostalgic visions. “Memory plays an important part in the idea of immortality,” Barnet remarked when considering this work. “In the end, all we have left is memory.”¹⁶

ENDNOTES

1. Jessica Nicoll, “‘A Certain Slant of Light:’ Will Barnet and New England,” in Stavitsky, *Will Barnet: A Timeless World*, (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 2000), 69-70.
2. Gail Stavitsky, “Will Barnet: A Timeless World,” in Stavitsky, *Will Barnet: A Timeless World*, (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 2000), 14-15.
3. Quoted in Hayden Herrera, *Arshile Gorky: His Life and Work*, (New York, NY, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 118.
4. Twig Johnson, “Will Barnet and Native American Art,” in Stavitsky, *Will Barnet: A Timeless World*, (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 2000), 61-67.
5. *Ibid.*, 64.
6. Conversation with the artist, July 26, 2004, Sebasco Estates, ME.
7. Conversation with the artist, May 9, 2003, New York, NY.
8. Conversation with the artist, July 26, 2004, Sebasco Estates, ME.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Quoted in Jessica Nicoll, “‘A Certain Slant of Light:’ Will Barnet and New England,” in Stavitsky, *Will Barnet: A Timeless World*, (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 2000), 75.
14. Conversation with the artist, July 26, 2004, Sebasco Estates, ME.
15. Conversation with the artist, May 9, 2003, New York, NY.
16. Conversation with the artist, July 26, 2004, Sebasco Estates, ME.

Unless specifically noted, information for this essay was drawn from conversations with Will Barnet during March through May, 2003; January through March, 2004; and June through August, 2004.



Study for The Father,
c. 1990-92, charcoal on
vellum, 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches



Study for My Father's House,
December 24, 1991,
charcoal, gouache on vellum,
8 1/8 x 11 7/8 inches



Study for My Father's House,
January 6, 1992,
charcoal, graphite on vellum,
6 1/8 x 7 inches



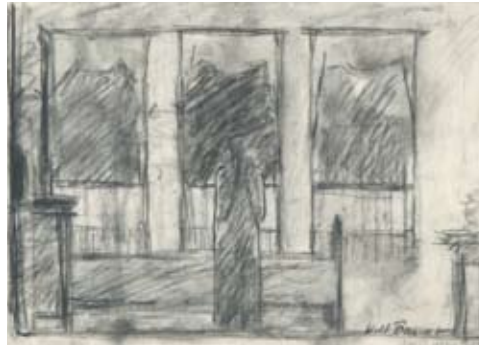
Study for My Father's House,
c. 1992, charcoal on paper
taped to foam core,
3 7/8 x 4 3/4 inches

My Father's House, 1992,
oil on canvas,
37 1/2 x 40 inches





Three Windows, 1992,
oil on canvas,
32½ x 46¼ inches



Study for Three Windows,
c. 1990-92, charcoal on vellum,
6 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 12 inches



Study for Three Windows,
c. 1990-92, charcoal on vellum,
10 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches



Study for The Vase, 1993,
charcoal on vellum,
2 3/8 x 1 8 7/8 inches



Study for The Vase, July 1991,
charcoal, gouache, watercolor,
graphite on vellum,
1 3/2 x 9 inches

The Mantle, 1992,
oil on canvas,
40 x 42 3/4 inches





Study for The Kitchen, 1992,
watercolor, gouache, charcoal
on vellum, 26 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches

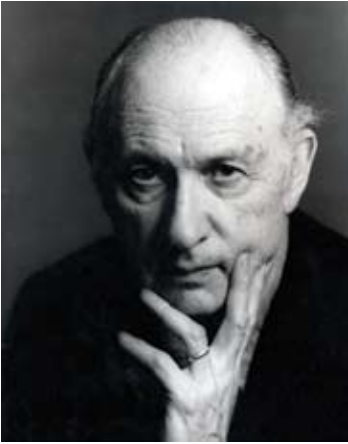


Study for The Family, 1992,
charcoal, watercolor, gouache
on vellum, 12 x 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches



The Kitchen, 1992,
oil on canvas,
31¼ x 44½ inches

Artist Biography



Will Barnet

Barnet's professional career has spanned nearly eight decades, from his early work in the Graphic Arts Division of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration to recent retrospective exhibitions. His work appears in more than 200 museum collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York; the National Gallery of Art; the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Farnsworth Library and Museum, Rockland, ME; the Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, NJ; the Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME; the Vatican Museum in Rome; and the British Museum in London. Barnet began a distinguished teaching career while still a student with drawing classes for settlement children at Salem's House of Seven Gables. He went on to teach at the Art Students League in New York City; Cornell University; Cooper Union; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; and Yale University. He is a member of the National Academy of Design and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in London.

Exhibition Checklist

Will Barnet : My Father's House

DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLORS

1. *My Mother*, c.1930,
pen & ink, ink wash, gouache, charcoal, graphite
on paper, 15 x 11½ inches
2. *Mother*, c.1930,
pen & ink, ink wash, gouache on paper,
11⅞ x 8⅞ inches
3. *My Mother*, c.1930,
pen & ink, ink wash, gouache, graphite on paper,
8 x 7⅞ inches
4. *Drawing of My Mother*, 1937,
pen & ink, ink wash, gouache, graphite on paper,
14 x 9⅜ inches
5. *Father and Parrot*, c.1940,
tempera on board, 10⅞ x 7¾ inches
6. *Father and Parrot*, c.1940s,
pen & ink, ink wash on vellum, 13 x 9⅞ inches
7. *Father and Parrot*, c.1940s,
oil-stick, ink on paper, 12 x 7⅝ inches
8. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite, watercolor on vellum,
16¾ x 13⅞ inches
9. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite on vellum, 13¹⁵/₁₆ x 16⅞ inches
10. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite on vellum, 16⅞ x 13¹⁵/₁₆ inches
11. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
pen & ink on paper, 10 x 8 inches
12. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite on paper, 6 x 8 inches
13. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite, pen & ink on paper, 10 x 7½ inches
14. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite, pen & ink on paper, 10 x 7½ inches
15. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite on paper, 12 x 9 inches
16. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite on paper, 12 x 9 inches
17. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite on paper, 12 x 9 inches
18. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite on paper, 12 x 9 inches
19. *Study for The Sisters*, c.1960-62,
graphite on paper, 12 x 9 inches
20. *Study for The Father*, c.1990-92,
charcoal on vellum, 8⅞ x 11⅞ inches
21. *Study for The Father*, c.1990-92,
charcoal, graphite, wash on board,
8⅞ x 8½ inches
22. *Study for The Father*, c.1990-92,
charcoal on vellum, 9½ x 7⅞ inches
23. *Study for Three Windows*, c.1990-92,
charcoal on vellum, 10¾ x 13½ inches
24. *Study for Three Windows*, c.1990-92,
charcoal on vellum, 6⅝ x 12 inches
25. *Study for The Vase*, 1991,
charcoal, gouache, watercolor on vellum taped
to board, 7⅞ x 6½ inches
26. *Study for The Vase*, 1993,
charcoal on vellum, 23⁵/₈ x 18⅞ inches
27. *Study for Three Windows*, c.1990-92,
charcoal on vellum, image 30½ x 44¼ inches
28. *Study for The Vase*, July 1991,
charcoal, gouache, watercolor, graphite on
vellum, 13½ x 9 inches
29. *Study for My Father's House*,
December 24, 1991, charcoal, gouache on
vellum, 8½ x 11⅞ inches
30. *Study for My Father's House*, c.1992,
charcoal on paper taped to foam core,
3⅞ x 4¾ inches
31. *Study for My Father's House*,
January 6, 1992, charcoal, graphite on vellum,
6⅞ x 7 inches

32. *Study for My Father's House*, c.1992,
charcoal on vellum, 9⅜ x 6⅝ inches
33. *Study for My Father's House*, c.1992,
charcoal on vellum, image 38 x 35 inches
34. *Study for The Family*, 1992,
charcoal on vellum, 12⅞ x 8⅞ inches
35. *Study for The Family*, 1992, charcoal,
watercolor, gouache on vellum, 12 x 9⅞ inches
36. *Study for The Kitchen*, 1992,
watercolor, gouache, charcoal on vellum,
20⅞ x 18⅞ inches
37. *Artist's Mother*, c.1934,
watercolor on paper, 15½ x 11¼ inches

PAINTINGS

38. *The Mantle*, 1992,
oil on canvas, 40 x 42¾ inches
39. *Three Windows*, 1992,
oil on canvas, 32½ x 46¼ inches
40. *The Kitchen*, 1992,
oil on canvas, 31¼ x 44½ inches
41. *My Father's House*, 1992,
oil on canvas, 37½ x 40 inches

PRINTS

42. *Italian Section-Beverly, Mass.*, 1937,
etching, aquatint on paper, 11¼ x 15¼ inches
43. *My Father*, 1937,
etching, aquatint on paper, 16 x 17¾ inches
44. *My Father*, 1937,
aquatint on paper, 15 x 15⅞ inches
45. *My Father*, 1937,
woodcut on paper, 12½ x 21⅞ inches

*All works courtesy of the artist and
Alexandre Gallery, New York.*



Study for The Family, 1992,
charcoal on vellum,
12 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the trust and cooperation of Will Barnet and his wife Elena. Both made time in their schedules to conduct interviews, review material and locate previously unexhibited work. Their hospitality and support has been much appreciated. Without them, this exhibition would not have been possible. We are also thankful to John Updike who generously contributed a preface for this catalogue. As a current resident of Beverly and long time acquaintance of the artist, his observations proved to be thoughtful and incisive.

This exhibition and catalog has been realized through the generosity of many individuals and organizations. We are especially thankful to Daniel Meyers, whose support was key. Special thanks go to William Goldberg and his brothers Richard, Robert and Steven; Bill and Sara Fishbane and family; and Martin and Marilyn Levine and their daughters Sheri Levine Cole and Debra Levine Mason. Thanks are also due James Rosenquist; the Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason Foundation; and George and Penny Wingate. Significant support was provided by the Cummings Center Foundation, former site of United Shoe where Barnet's father worked. We are also grateful for assistance provided by Ona Barnet, Will and Elena Barnet's daughter.

We are very grateful for the scholarship of a number of art historians, particularly the Chief Curator of The Montclair Art Museum, Gail Stavitsky, whose retrospective exhibition *Will Barnet: A Timeless World*, was cause for extensive research. In addition to her comprehensive

essay, Stavitsky called upon Jessica Nicoll, Chief Curator and Curator of American Art at the Portland Museum of Art, and Twig Johnson, Curator of Native American Art at the Montclair Museum. Nicoll's discussion of Barnet's relation to a New England heritage proved invaluable, as did Johnson's examination of Barnet's connection to aboriginal art. Together all essays contained in Gail Stavitsky's catalog *Will Barnet: A Timeless World* provide the basis for any serious consideration of the artist.

Also useful was an essay by W. Jackson Rushing III, "Will Barnet's 'True Freedom: Abstraction in Theory and Practice,'" which appeared in the 1998 catalog *Will Barnet: The Abstract Work*, a noted exhibition organized by Alexandre Fine Art, Inc. in association with Tibor de Nagy Gallery. We are grateful to Hayden Herrera, for observations expressed in a conversation about the New York art world of the nineteen thirties, as well as material presented in her book *Arshile Gorky: His Life and Work*. Thanks are also due Pat Hills, Professor of Art History at Boston University; and John Stomberg, Associate Director of the Williams College Art Museum.

The Montserrat College of Art Gallery is grateful for assistance provided by the Alexandre Gallery, particularly from Phil Alexandre and his director Marie Evans. They have been unfailingly helpful, supplying transparencies, research material, and advice. Their organization proved essential to the realization of this project. Great appreciation is due Gail Dubois for editorial support, as well as Jennifer Bennet for transcription of taped interviews. Montserrat College of Art Gallery assistants Dottie Tribeman and Amy Jean Porter gave administrative support, as did Tufts Museum Studies intern Lisa Cherkerzian and Gordon College intern Rachel Stahl. Anna Langstaff, Assistant Director of the Beverly Public Library, provided research material and help with programming. Finally, we would like to thank many individuals within the Montserrat College of Art community who have made this exhibition possible.

PHOTO CREDITS

Photographs by Dana Salvo.

Page 4. *Italian Section-Beverly, Mass.*, 1937, etching, aquatint on paper

Page 9. *My Father*, etching, aquatint on paper

Page 20. *Study for The Vase*, 1993, charcoal on vellum

Photos courtesy of Alexandre Gallery, New York.

Page 17. *My Father's House*, 1992, oil on canvas

Page 18. *Three Windows*, 1992, oil on canvas

Page 21. *The Mantle*, 1992, oil on canvas,

Page 22. *Study for The Kitchen*, 1992, watercolor, gouache, charcoal on vellum

Page 23. *The Kitchen*, 1992, oil on canvas

Page 24. *Photo of Will Barnet*

PUBLICATION CREDITS

Publication Coordinator **Katherine French**

Design **John Colan**

Copy Editors **Gail Dubois, Jo Lennox, Erin Dionne**

Printing **Deschamps Printing Company, Salem, MA**

